

to promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values inherent in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Civilization.*"

# The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin

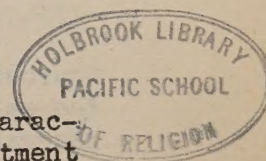
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## THE CHURCH AND THE RURAL COMMUNITY

By C. M. Serson\*



"The existing industrial order, with the acquisitive temper characteristic of our society, tends to recklessness and sacrilege in the treatment of natural resources." -- Malvern Report bl2.

It may seem to be of little use to say much on this subject, as the damage has already been done. Everybody is aware how our natural resources have been recklessly squandered. Acquisitiveness has been active throughout our history. From the fur monopoly of the old regime, through the Land Grant scandals of the Loyalist days to the hydro-electric power steals of our own time, there has been a reckless wastage of our natural resources because conservation doesn't show immediate profit. It began with the fur trade in their early days, it continued in the lumber boom of the last century and the wheat mining of the prairies during this one.

Those who have suffered the most from this acquisitive temper are the farmers, because farming is the one business in Canada where the producer has no control of the price of his products, and the consumer no say in the price of the things he must buy. The perishable nature of his produce makes it necessary for him to sell at a certain time (of ripeness or maturity) and if he attempts to hold back these products for a higher price, he faces the cost of storage and the danger of deterioration.

This is the fundamental problem of agriculture, especially in what is called "an economy of plenty" which is as fictitious as infinity. Let me illustrate what I mean by looking at the wheat situation. (Official Handbook 1942, p. 69) In 1940, we harvested the second largest wheat crop in the country's history, which raised the wheat surplus to an unusually high level. In 1941, seven million acres were taken out of wheat, and still more in 1942. But in spite of that, the very favourable growing season in 1942 made the wheat crop 41 million bushels larger than ever before. Is it any wonder that speaking "on behalf of the 450,000 members of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, which is representative of every province in the Dominion," H. H. Hannam, President, said: "The wheat program is a good example of the folly of trying to carry on without a national agricultural marketing and produc-

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tion program. The lack of an adequate farm policy for the Dominion means that agriculture becomes the victim of a series of ill-advised last minute emergency measures which cannot be regarded in even our most generous moments as the product of competent leadership or good statesmanship."

What has been the result of this lack of policy and planning as regards Canadian natural resources? In Ontario, within the last 100 years, 80 to 85 per cent of the once permanently flowing streams have become temporary. Water erosion is becoming increasingly dangerous and wide-spread. Wind erosion is very prevalent in many counties in Southwest Ontario and along the north shore of Lake Ontario. In a number of places four or five feet of surface soil has been blown away.

This is equally true of the prairies where the water and soil resources were recklessly squandered. "The extent of human wastage caused by the settlement of the extreme drought areas of Alberta and Western Canada generally will never be measured. Much of it is hidden, and can be recorded only in the form of wrecked hopes and silent despair, the destruction of initiative and self-reliance, the exhaustion of life savings, reduced standards of living and inadequate education. These are some of the fruits and costs of our intent and desire to exploit our great resources, without first measuring their limitations."

The ultimate basis of any society is its natural resources. Wasting of land is like eating up principal, or destroying capital, and that brings with it a loss of income.

Less than 1,500 farmers pay income tax. (1942) The loss of purchasing power not only means curtailment of industrial production with its consequent unemployment, but it also brings a lowering of the standard of living, and that means:

1. Inadequate nutrition. Even a farm family can't eat properly on less than \$1.00 a day; it can't afford sugar. Flour has to be bought even on the Prairies at the rate of six bags of wheat for one of flour.

2. This not only brings susceptibility to diseases, but it also precludes medical attention. The farmer has to pay \$1.00 a mile to have a doctor call on him, and even if he can go to the doctor, often he cannot afford either to take the time to do it or the \$2.00 it will cost for an office visit. There is no money for vaccines and toxoids, for medicines or for public health. No school nurses, no clinics, no pasteurization, no quarantine. And the children die, or else are so stunted and deformed by unchecked disease that they cannot take advantage of the free education which an enlightened and civilized province provides for them.

Out of 3,000 children examined in Manitoba, 70 per cent were found to be physically defective.

In the only county in Ontario that has complete medical inspection, 983 children out of 2,614 had 1,100 defects. The next year only 114 of these defects had been corrected, and 828 children were found to have new ones.

In Ontario, 41 per cent of the population live in areas of less than 1,000 population, and are looked after by 25 per cent of the doctors. In



misfit, seeking the level of a meagre capacity. Rural work is a man-sized job; our strongest men are none too good for it. A vital, aggressive, resourceful, sacrificial man, loving God and His church, and loving those for whom Christ died, can find in the rural field an incomparable opportunity for noble service."

We have failed to realize that farming is a skilled profession, and that those who are to minister to farmers should be properly and specially prepared for their job, and not only that, but because of their isolation they need to have someone who will represent them at headquarters and keep them in touch with the best methods of rural work. Nothing is more necessary than a Department of Rural Work with an Executive Secretary of initiative and ability, with an adequate budget to direct a program which would correlate and rehabilitate the work of the church in rural areas.

What is needed is a greater realization of the difficulties of rural work, and the greatest of these is "transportation." Of all the headaches of rural work, this is the most bitter. It is our own greatest single item of expense in connection with our mission work. We started off, as most rural clergy have to start off, with two second-hand cars. The upkeep was terrific. After every week-end, they had to go to the garage for repairs, replacements and adjustments. I tried to show the Superior the false economy of this, but he only replied, "We can't afford to buy a brand new car." I felt that we could not afford to keep the old ones. First I persuaded someone to buy us a new Model A Ford. The contrast in upkeep was amazing, and helped to prove my point. By that time, the second old car was completely done in, and had to be sold for "junk." We got a new car, and our annual bill for transportation went down in cost, but rose in efficiency. From fifteen years' experience, I am convinced that it does not pay to have rural clergy drive old second-hand cars. Like commercial firms, we find that it is really cheaper to buy new cars, and turn them in after 25,000 - 30,000 miles. This keeps our upkeep down to a minimum. Our repairs are few, and our cars provide us with efficient transportation at a cost of one cent a mile for depreciation, plus gas and oil.

No other single thing would do more to help the rural clergy and their work than to junk the old jalopies that most of them try to drive, provide them all with new cars or jeeps, and then give them a transportation allowance on a mileage basis, quite apart from their stipends. Some Dioceses could handle their own financing, and others would probably need help from the Department of Rural Work.

The initial cost would be high, but not insuperable, and the upkeep would not be outside the ability of the church as a whole, while the benefits and advantages of such a plan would be incalculable.

There is need also of an enlarged view of the nature and scope of what we call "Church Work." All those who work for, and help to create a social order in which the Christian life can be lived more fully are doing "Church Work" -- even though they may not bring many people to Baptism, or present many candidates for Confirmation.

Yes, the church has a long way to go. We have already done too little, and soon it may be too late. The world is already travailing to give birth to a new social order, and the church will have to assist at that birth, and if she is to be a good midwife, she needs to be prepared to cooperate with



As a recent English speaker has said: "I begin to be frightened of plans, programs and blueprints for a New World whenever they are represented, expressly or by implication, as the key which will unlock the door to a new era, whenever, in fact, we are asked to turn the key in the lock, and all else will follow.

"But all else won't follow. And any sort of program that isn't quite honestly facing up to that bleak fact is simply chasing a will o' the wisp that will land its leaders and their followers into the swamps. 'All systems can be perverted by the selfishness of men' -- and are.

"Planning is in the air. But so also is totalitarianism. The danger of the days ahead may lie, not in the refusal of the 'powers-that-be' to produce 'reform.' Rather, perhaps, in their readiness to do so--at a price. And the price will be very carefully concealed--so carefully that it will seem that there is no price.

"Healthy growth proceeds from the roots up, and not from the mast down. Reformation on mass production principles is a denial of the human spirit, whose rightful service must be willing and purposeful and personal." (Community Service News, No. 2, 1943)

It is just at this point that the church can make her greatest contribution, and it is just here that the church in the past has so often failed. The church at its institutional level has too often been a disruptive force in the community. I am inclined to think that this jealousy and competition can be traced to economic causes in most cases. Too often, because their stipends have been so low, and because in small communities the loss or alienation of a single supporter has meant so much to the family budget, rural clergy have often been forced by economic necessity to prostitute their ministry by keeping alive the antagonisms and denominational divisions which might, with the increase of community spirit and cooperation in community projects, tend to disappear. This is not always the case, but there is still far too much of it, and it is often justified on high doctrinal grounds, which really have little or nothing to do with it. The real, though often unconscious cause of the trouble, is the ceaseless prodding of economic necessity.

This is in turn due to the "policy"--if you can call it that--of our own church. When a man offers himself for the ministry, he is trained in this excellent institution, or in the one across the street. Apart from the theological teaching he receives, he gets a certain amount of technical training, and much of that is related to city work. Then, as soon as he is ordained, and sometimes sooner, he is put out into what was described to me as a "nice little country parish" where he is entirely on his own, where too often he finds there has been a vacancy of months, if not years, and where, to quote a contemporary of mine "you make mistakes that it takes you years to live down."

The main idea seems to be to "keep moving" in the hope that you may eventually reach that Paradise to which all the country clergy look forward, a parish in the city of Toronto and a slice of that wonderful Rectory Fund.

The late Bishop of Mississippi said some years ago: "The rural field is no place for the peripatetic person, seeking preferment, nor for the battle-scarred veteran, seeking a well-earned rest, nor for the unfortunate



Quebec, the rural 40 per cent have to be satisfied with 13 per cent of the doctors.

The inevitable moral effect of such conditions has been: The breakdown of community, due to loss of morale, of ambition and interest, of strength and energy. It costs a little something to have a social good time. You have to get dressed up for one thing. You can't do that if you have no money. You can't go to church either. So you just drop out of circulation, you cease to live, but continue to exist. Poverty saps the vitality of people, and stifles their self-respect.

You can't keep clean without soap, you can't cook properly with old worn out utensils, you can't work properly without proper food, or rest properly with worn out bedding on a broken down bed. You get sick, but you can't go to the doctor; you sink from bewilderment through discouragement to despair. You don't even dare to die, because if you do, you know your children will be turned over to other farmers as poorly off as you are, who will work them even harder than you have to do yourself.

Those are some of the Canadian Manifestations of what is called "The Rural Problem."

Let us now consider the recommendation put forward in the Malvern Report to rectify this problem: "In like manner we must recover reverence for the earth and the resources, treating it no longer as a reservoir of potential wealth to be exploited, but as a storehouse of divine bounty on which we utterly depend. This will carry with it a deliberate revival of agriculture, both by securing to the agricultural labourer good wages, and to the farmer a secure and just price. We regard this as indispensable to the true balance of the national life."

The obvious need is for planning and social control. There must be planning in agriculture. The real cause of the present shortages is not only our increased exports, but also the fact that for the first time in years ordinary people have got enough money to buy enough to eat.

The farm problem is then really the problem of increasing the purchasing power of the consumers of farm products. That is why the recent Food Conference at Hot Springs, Virginia, said: "Expansion of industry on a sound basis in undeveloped and other areas, and equality of access to materials and power are indispensable to any comprehensive plan for advancing agriculture."

You cannot hope to have a plan for agriculture that will be successful unless it is part of a planned society. Planned agriculture must be part of a planned national economy.

Much has already been done in the West towards conservation of the soil, but that had to be done with the help of the Federal Government, though not by them alone. National planning must be accompanied by provincial and community planning, and it is at this level that the church can do her best work.

It is for this revival of true community that the Malvern Conference urges the restoration of agriculture. For without the revival of community, there is a grave danger in all this planning.



every other agency which can help her in her task. She needs to deepen and strengthen her relationships with Government agencies and Volunteer Welfare Associations, so that they may work together more closely and sympathetically, and that must be done now beforehand. Too often the complaint of a friend of mine, who is giving himself whole-heartedly to the cause of rural reconstruction is justified. "To be a liberator you have to be out in front, and too often the church crawls painfully far behind, reluctantly accepting what has been won by others, instead of helping to win them herself."

Above all, she needs to encourage more cordial relationship in her own family. In the past, we have been too inclined to magnify our denominational differences, and be suspicious of any cooperation, even in those projects where we could do so without any sacrifice of principle.

Here are things about which we are agreed; here are things which we can do together. If we cannot make the "Four Freedoms" work in our own neighbourhood, in our own country, how can we expect them to function in Europe or in Asia?

Sir Stafford Cripps has said: "There must be a new intention and determination to carry into all activities of our daily life the fundamental teachings of the New Testament. That means we must be prepared to accept all their implications for our social and political life. I feel strongly that we have got to have a moral background to our whole life. We have tended to divorce our religious and ethical values from our practical affairs. We try to live in two worlds. One is the world of our religion, our thought, our imagination; the other is what we call the "real" world of politics and society and business. But we must learn to do as we think."

If the churches will take the attitude of the Malvern Resolutions (which were based on the rejection and abandonment of the profit motive) and really implement them, they will be playing an enormous part. But they must really implement them—not just use them as a screen for doing "nothing."

What is needed here is a leadership of that kind in our communities. We clergy must not only lead our people to know and understand the ideas which are being put forward by such leaders as Archbishop Temple, but we must also provide leadership in putting these ideas into practice by organizing credit unions, cooperatives, study groups and community projects. This will make it possible for our people to find a new and thrilling connection in their own lives between what they hear us say on Sunday, and what they do during the week. We must help them to find in our Holy Religion a dynamic for everything they do, thus permeating and uplifting all their living. When they come to know Jesus on our altars on Sundays, they will carry Him back to their homes and factories, their offices and farms to be with them throughout the week, and this country will become what it ought to be — "His Dominion from Sea to Sea."